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**HVCEO TESTIMONY ON
HB 6629
AN ACT CONCERNING
REGIONALISM IN CT**

to the Planning and Development Committee
from HVCEO Director Jonathan Chew
March 18, 2013

1) TENSION WITH OPM PROCESS

OPM is soon to complete a boundary study for the planning regions. The due date is January 1, 2014. That legislatively authorized study includes varied data sets, consultations and a professional research process.

This is the second attempt by the Planning and Development Committee to cancel the OPM study. It is clear that the Planning and Development Committee objects to the OPM study. It is not apparent to Danbury Area mayors and first selectmen why this Committee opposes that approach, signed into law last year.

I am testifying at the direction of the Danbury Area mayors and first selectmen to oppose the Planning and Development Committee's effort to cancel the OPM study. These mayors and first selectmen, all of who belong to the HVCEO planning region, do not understand the resistance to the OPM study.

**2) INPUT TO OPM STUDY
REVEALS DANBURY ROLE**

As authorized by the OPM legislation, each region may submit data for evaluation. HVCEO has identified numerous state and federal data sets documenting that the City of Danbury qualifies to remain as the center of its own planning region.

HB 6629 would eliminate Danbury from the role of center of its own planning region. This is a crucial issue for western Connecticut and one that is not acceptable to the HVCEO CEOs.

3) BOUNDARY CHANGE THEN REQUIRES MUNICIPAL RATIFICATION

Looking ahead to the months after the revision of regional boundaries, forty or more municipalities may need to initiate the legislatively required ratification process. That is, revision to the local ordinance that controls membership in a planning region.

Towns may well be unhappy with what is proposed, but a state study providing a thorough explanation for public discussion at town meetings will be crucial to obtain support for the change.

HB 6629 provides no explanation for regional assignment. Old county boundaries will seem like a poor justification.

Note that when the current regional boundaries were set up near 1960, they were crossed at will – seen as too archaic to represent Connecticut's historically much later metropolitan development pattern. Even more so now.

The intent of HB 6629, to remove the well crafted OPM study methodology and revert to the substate boundaries of 1680, even with a county boundary "toggle feature" will prove to be an insufficient base for municipalities to explain to the public the change in their regional planning organization membership ordinance.

4) PUNISHMENT BILL NEXT?

The next step for the legislature would be punishment legislation for non-complying municipalities. Legislators may well balk this time, to hit their own districts hard. I am to punish my district for what sin?

This will all take time, and another set of quite ferocious politics will be enabled. The goal of more creative regionalism gets delayed and degraded. HVCEO is opposed to changes in regional planning boundaries for no apparent reason.

5) PATIENCE ADVISED

HVCEO endorses the current OPM professional study approach. Our area may not get what it wants, but the facts will be on the table within a level playing field.

To speed the era of better regionalism, on behalf of HVCEO I urge the Committee to let the OPM research surface before the Committee decides on its next strategy. If you go just a little slower, we will all get there a lot faster.